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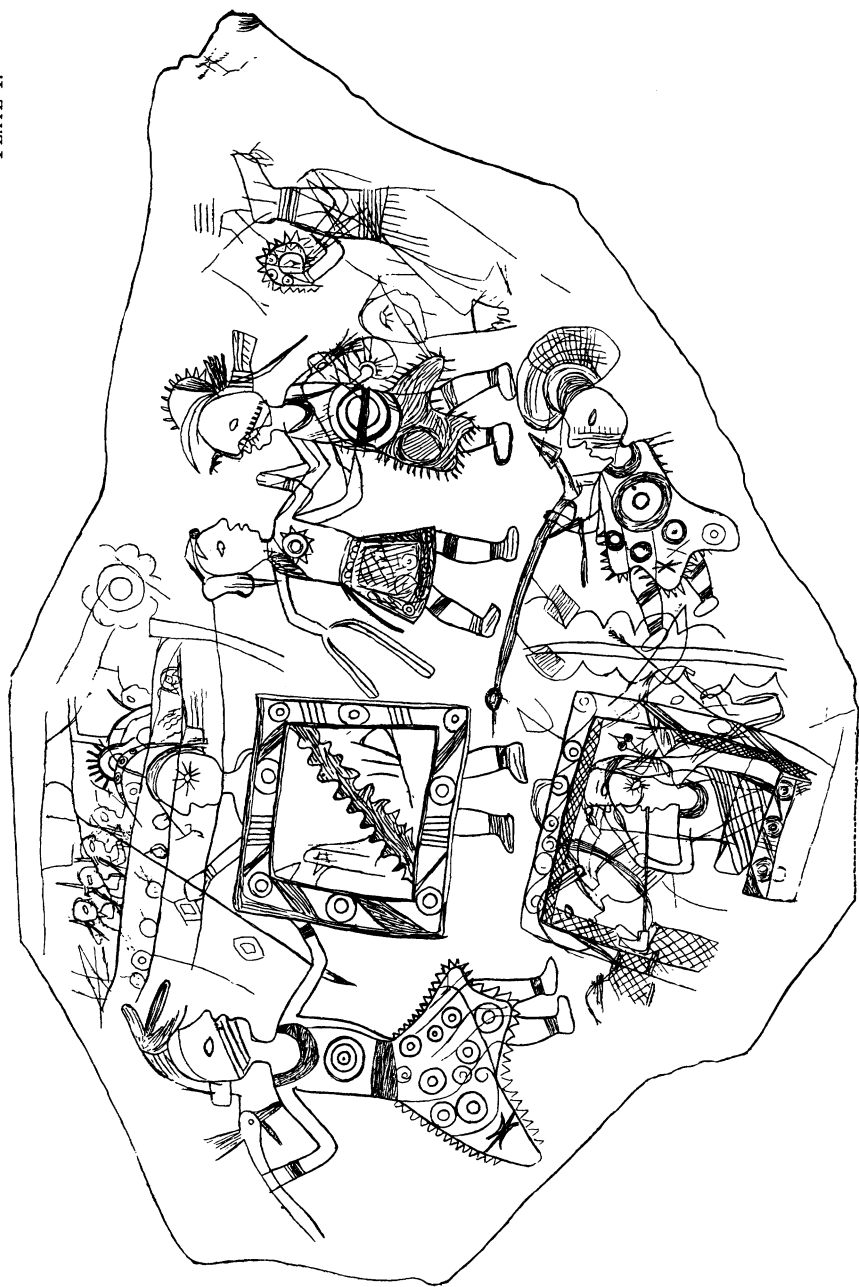
THE THRUSTON TABLET.

BY W. H. HOLMES.

The slab upon which this remarkable example of aboriginal delineation is engraved is of gray fossiliferous limestone of silurian age, derived, no doubt, from the formations of the locality in which it was found. According to Gen. Gates P. Thruston, by whom it was first described in his work on the Antiquities of Tennessee, this stone was found on or near the surface of the ground on Rocky Creek, in Sumner county, and was presented, with other relics, to the Tennessee Historical Society about the year 1878. It is 19 inches long, 15 wide, and about one inch thick, although varying considerably in the latter dimension on account of the unevenly weathered surfaces. The shape is unsymmetric and the outlines uneven, portions having been broken away in recent times. Both sides have been well covered with engravings, but the reverse side has been subjected to more active weathering and retains but imperfect traces of the devices.

The figures were engraved, for the most part, with sharp points, which were handled with considerable freedom, yet not with great certainty or grace. Certain portions of the design are filled in with rudely scratched lines, while others, such as the ornaments and parts of the costume, have been rubbed down with a blunt point and still retain a considerable degree of polish. In a few cases parts of the costume were painted red, the color being now barely traceable. The engraving appears to have been done at somewhat distinct periods, as indicated by differences in the degree of weathering of lines within the same space. The more recently executed figures have been drawn over the earlier, resulting in places in great confusion.

The delineations consist principally of human figures placed in a variety of attitudes and comprise three or four groups, more or less independent of each other. As a matter of record the pictures should be described separately and in considerable detail. General Thruston has contented himself with brief references to the leading figures.



The principal group consists of four full-length standing figures, which extend along the greater length of the tablet. They are about six inches in height and are arranged in pairs at a convenient distance for shaking hands or cracking heads. A question may fairly be raised as to the significance of the attitudes depicted. General Thruston infers that a friendly salutation is intended ; but it may also be suggested that the encounter is warlike in nature, or that a mock contest, such as are introduced into dances, is represented. The first personage on the left extends the left hand so that it touches or passes behind the shield held by the second individual, while the right hand brandishes what may represent a rattle, but which strongly suggests a war-club or hatchet.

The second figure faces the first and holds a spear in the right hand, while with the left he supports a large square shield, bordered with scroll devices and crossed obliquely by a serrate band. The right arm and shoulders are seen above the shield, and the legs from the knees down appear below it. The third and fourth members of the group face each other in close juxtaposition. That on the left holds what may be likened to a bundle of strands, a belt of wampum, a sling, or similar article. The left arm has been drawn twice, giving a confused result. One hand seems raised to meet the right hand of the opposing figure, while the other touches that figure at the belt. The right arm of the second figure of this pair has also been drawn in two positions. One hand rests upon the shoulder of the opposing personage, while the other grasps his hand. The left arm of the fourth figure is obscure ; some lines appear to make it cross the body to meet the lower left hand of the opposing figure, and others seem to carry it behind the body, where it is probably intended to grasp an object—a weapon or a rattle—very obscurely seen in the drawing.

General Thruston believes that the third figure probably represents a female, as the hair is dressed differently from the others and there is an absence of tattooing and of plumes or elaborate head-gear. In physical characters and dress there is a close resemblance in all the figures.

The costumes are notable, not only as records of the habits of the aborigines of the period, but as illustrations of the graphic acquirements and skill of the sylvan artist. The head-dresses are in most cases rather elaborate, combining the knotted hair, the plumes, and the lofty crests of ordinary aboriginal forms. A skirt or shirt,

fastened at the waist with a wide girdle, is worn in most cases. The skirts are plain, scalloped, or fringed, and are decorated over the surface with circles or scroll-work. The wrists, knees, and ankles are encircled by lines representing ornaments or fastenings, and a necklace in each case supports a more or less elaborate gorget. Moccasins are worn in all cases. The skirt and moccasins of the third figure were painted red and still retain portions of the color. The tattoo-marks upon the faces are of the same general type in all cases, and consist of a group of parallel lines running from the nose downward across the cheek to the back of the neck. The third figure is without these marks. The shield held by the second figure is large and square and is bordered by a band of scroll-work. A serrate band extends obliquely across the shield, giving it the appearance of a totemic banner.

As to the significance of the various devices upon the costumes and weapons, it is perhaps useless to speculate. Scrolls are associated with three of the figures and groups of concentric circles with the other three.

Above the principal group of figures and partly behind or across the head of the second personage are some small, rather indefinite devices, arranged in horizontal rows and apparently separated by strong horizontal lines, which, however, from the degree of weathering, seem to be newer than the associated devices. The arrangement of the obscure figures suggests an alphabetic record or rows of pictographic devices. A close examination makes apparent a strong resemblance to human heads. Each roundish figure has a suggestion of plumes, and in two cases the face, eye, neck, and upper part of the body may be made out. To the right of these devices and over the head of the third figure of the main group is a conventional delineation of the sun, which may pertain to the landscape setting of the principal group, or which may be a totemic device belonging to one of the personages, or which again may be independent of the other parts of this engraving.

Below the main line of figures are two groups of particular interest. That beneath the second figure of the line and occupying the lower angle of the slab is very much confused, there being traces of at least five figures occupying parts of the space in common. The principal personage, however, can be clearly made out. He is seated within a square frame-work or enclosure and is smoking a long-stemmed pipe of the form quite common in Tennessee. The

drawing of this figure is interesting on account of its resemblance to ancient Mexican work in its conception and treatment. The figure drawn in profile sits upon what may be a mat, which, as in Mexican work, stands upon edge, the figure resting upon the upper margin. The inclosing rectangle resembles the shield held by the standing warrior above, but it possibly represents the house or chamber in which the smoker sits, after the Mexican manner of delineation. The American tribes had no conception of perspective.

To the right of the sitting figure is a full-length figure, placed at such an angle in relation to the others as to be nearly prostrate. This personage grasps an object of problematic nature—a weapon, perhaps—which is held after the manner of a gun and from the outer end of which appears to issue smoke. The end of this object next the shoulder does not turn down as does the stock of a gun, but bends upward in front of the face and terminates in a heavy barbed point like that of a spear. Pendant from the horizontal shaft are two rectangular tassel-like figures, more appropriate to a pipe than to a gun. In costume the figure agrees pretty closely with the first and fourth figures of the main group above, but the head-dress is of a distinct type.

The space near the acute angle of the slab and to the right of the main line of figures is nearly covered with confused and partly obliterated figures and parts of figures. The most recent of these is a leg on a scale twice that of the other designs and drawn in an inverted position. Less distinct are portions of heads and figures with obscure indications of regalia, weapons, or ceremonial objects.

On the reverse side of the slab are traces of similar figures. On the left hand is a warrior holding a bow and arrow in the extended left hand, the right hand resting against the body. In front of him is a personage seated within a square enclosure bordered with scrolls; he holds a weapon, rattle, or wand in the left hand.

Whether the principal groups of figures of the obverse belong together or are separate conceptions cannot be determined, and the significance, if there is any significance, of all or of any one must remain obscure. The action in contest or in mock contest, dance, or other ceremony would be the same. The differences in costume and markings are pronounced, but not so pronounced that all may not have pertained to one tribe. Some of the devices may be clan or personal totems.

These delineations correspond somewhat closely to the best work

on shell and copper, but are inferior to many in conception and execution. The age is not great. The newer drawing retains a freshness of line and a polish of surface that could not endure through many centuries, whether embedded in the soil or exposed upon the surface.

This specimen forms an important addition to the interesting family of engraved tablets. Its authenticity has not been questioned and the most careful scrutiny does not develop any trace of the white man's touch or thought. The introduction of a gun, if susceptible of verification, would confirm the impression given by the fresh appearance of the engraving that the work is not of very great antiquity.

A rather rude sketch of the principal groups of figures is given in the accompanying plate. It is expected that an elaborate illustration of the tablet will be published by Colonel Mallery, of the Bureau of Ethnology, in a forthcoming work on Pictographs.

THE AMAZONS OF DAHOMEY.—These celebrated troops are now about 3,000 in number and divided into three brigades, of which the center brigade forms the king's body-guard. Each brigade consists of troops of five different arms :

1. The blunderbuss corps, or agbaraya, wearing blue tunics with white scarfs round their waists.
2. The elephant huntresses, or gbéto, with a brown and blue uniform and a headdress with two horns.
3. The nyekpleh-hentoh, armed with gigantic razors to decapitate the enemies' king, who is their principal object of attack.
4. The musketeers, or gulonnentoh, who are the most numerous, and carry flint-lock guns.
5. The archers, armed with bows and poisoned arrows, who, from the inferiority of their arms, are troops for parade rather than for service. There are none of them except in the king's body-guard.

These Amazons are vowed to celibacy under the most rigorous penalties. Occasionally, however, the king gives one of them in marriage to a meritorious soldier. (Father Chautard, ex-missionary to Dahomey, in *Bulletin de la Société de Géographie de Lyon*, vol. 9, pp. 70-'1, 1890.)

A VILLAGE IN NYASSALAND.—“Over and over again have I been struck with the beauty of the villages occupied by the Awanyakyusa. Landing on a sandy beach, you enter a grove of banana trees and walk along a perfectly level plain as in a palm section of a botanical garden. All weeds, grasses, garbage, and things unsightly are swept away by little boys who spend their morning sweeping, while, hidden away among the trees, are the circular houses of the natives. Each house is built of bamboo, with clay worked by the women into little rounded bricks. The roof is of thatch, which greatly overlaps in mushroom form, while the door is so large that a man can walk in upright. The door-posts are often painted with designs in red, yellow, and other colours, and altogether there is an air of comfort and plenty. These are the houses of the married people. Unmarried men live in long-shaped houses often twenty paces in length, called *akiwaggà*, and built of bamboos intertwined with reeds. Their cattle-houses are oblong, and equally prettily wrought. Herd-boys always sleep with the cattle; they on the one side and the cattle on the other. Few of the people have stools, but most sit upon mats or bamboo leaves cut down from the nearest tree. . . . Nor is their character of cleanliness visible in their villages confined to the outside. All their cooking-pots and drinking-cups are kept scrupulously clean and sweet, and the insides of their houses free from dirt—a rare quality in a native African.” (Rev. D. Kerr Cross, in *Scottish Geographical Magazine*, pp. 283-4, June, 1890.)

TATTOOING IN TUNIS.—*L'Anthropologie* for September-October, 1890, contains an important article by Dr. Bazin, “Étude sur le Tatouage dans la Régence de Tunis,” illustrated with numerous diagrams of patterns of tattooing employed in that region.

According to Dr. Bazin, the practice of tattooing is very widespread in Tunisia, but chiefly among the natives of Arab race, who are nomads, workmen in the towns, and laborers, and also among the fellahs. The Berbers, on the contrary, who have remained mountaineers, the merchants of the towns on the coast, and the rich proprietors are little or not at all tattooed. In regard to the last class this observation is interesting, as it proves very plainly that tattooing is nothing but an ornament, since the members of this class are clothed in such a way that the legs and arms are quite completely covered, so that it would be useless to draw figures which would be invisible or almost entirely hidden.